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UNCLAS ABUJA 000729

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR AF AND INL
NSC FOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JENDAYI FRAZER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PGOV CJAN KCRM SNAR NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NEW ATTORNEY GENERAL SWORN IN

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- Protect Accordingly.

1.(U) On the morning of March 6 President Obasanjo swore in Kanu Godwin Agabi as Nigeria's new Attorney General and Minister of Justice. He takes over the Ministry of Justice after the December 24 assassination of Chief Bola Ige.

2.(U) Agabi was AG from June 1999 till June 2000, when he was transferred to the Solid Minerals Ministry, a job he held until now. Like the late Bola Ige, Agabi is a Senior Advocate of Nigerian (SAN). Unlike Ige, Agabi is a member of the President's political party, the PDP, and he is a devout Roman Catholic, frequently leading prayers during the weekly Executive Council meetings. He was born and has spent most of his career in or representing the south-south state of Cross River. He has served as a federal Senator, a state (Cross River) Commissioner of Finance, and was appointed as a prosecutor on the Failed Banks and Financial Malpractices Tribunal during the Abacha years.

3.(SBU) Comment: The appointment of Agabi was rumored in the press and among the chatterati of Abuja but only within the last week. He does not seem to have left a strong impact during his last stint as AG, leading us to believe Obasanjo put a priority on stability and loyalty over distinguishing records in making this selection. Nevertheless, Agabi's past experience should allow him to become comfortable with the reins of the Justice Ministry in short order. This is good news for us, as we expect to engage him quickly on our outstanding requests for cooperation on a variety of law enforcement and judicial issues.
Jeter